

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to insert the serial number of a commonly-assigned U.S. application incorporated by reference. No new matter has been added.

With the above amendments, claims 1-8 and 13-20 remain in the application. Claims 9-12 have been cancelled without prejudice to expedite prosecution.

In response to the Election/Restriction Requirement, Applicant hereby elects group I, claims 1-8 and 13-20 without traverse. Accordingly, claims 9-12 have been cancelled without prejudice to expedite prosecution. Applicant reserves the right to pursue claims 9-12 in a divisional or continuing application.

In the last office action, independent claims 1 and 13 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent Publication No. US 2002/0033136 A1 to Savage et al. (hereinafter "Savage"). To anticipate a claim, a reference must disclose every element of the claim. Claim 1 is patentable over Savage for at least reciting: "a first single-wafer load lock". As noted in the specification, a single-wafer load lock can accommodate only one wafer at a time, and helps improve the throughput of a wafer processing system by allowing for relatively fast pump down and vent cycles (e.g., see specification, lines 14-17, page 5). Claim 1 also recites that the single-wafer load lock has a single wafer support. It is respectfully submitted that Savage does not disclose or suggest the use of a single-wafer load lock in a wafer processing system. As shown in FIG. 16 of Savage, load lock 80 can accommodate one wafer on an upper wafer shelf 85' and another wafer on a lower wafer shelf 87' (see also FIG. 16F, etc.; FIG. 9). That is, load lock 80 of Savage is not a single wafer load lock. Therefore, claim 1 is patentable over Savage. Claims 2-8, which directly or indirectly depend on claim 1, are also patentable over Savage for at least the same reasons that claim 1 is patentable.

Claim 13 is patentable over Savage for at least reciting: "a plurality of load locks, each of the plurality of load locks having an opening in direct communication with the process module". That is, claim 13 recites that there are several load locks coupled to the same process module (e.g., see FIG. 1B of the present application, showing load locks

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120A and 120B coupled to process module 130). Savage discloses a load lock 80 coupled to a process module 40, while another load lock 80 is coupled to another process module 40 (see Savage, FIG. 2). In other words, Savage discloses a wafer processing architecture that is significantly different from those disclosed and claimed in the present application. Therefore, claim 13 is patentable over Savage. Claims 14-20, which depend directly or indirectly on claim 13, are also patentable over Savage for at least the same reasons that claim 13 is patentable.

For at least the above reasons, claims 1-8 and 13-20 are in condition for allowance. If the next communication is other than a Notice Of Allowance, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at (408)436-2112.

If for any reason an insufficient fee has been paid, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge the insufficiency to Deposit Account No. 50-2427.

Respectfully Submitted,
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